

The Work as Will

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The Work as Will

Roland Barthes Reading Group

The Work as Will
(will to begin)

[This is an extract of the full work.]

The Roland Barthes Reading Group has been parsing Roland Barthes's *The Preparation of the Novel* for four years. His is a text in which the novel is never quite begun; or rather in which the *conditions* for beginning *repeatedly start* to be laid out. Beginnings as iteration, as preparation, as speculation. Beginnings multiple – as metaphors for the work not yet done. Our stuttering synopsis of the chapter 'Session of December 1, 1979' collates our notations, our 'minimal acts of writing' in which we promise, soon, to start.

The members of the group participating here are: Emma Bolland, Julia Calver, Helen Clarke, Louise Finney, Suzannah Gent, Sharon Kivland, Louise Michaels, Hestia Peppé, and Rachel Smith.

There was the inability to plot – as reader – even a sentence.

'An event in language is to take one step, and then another. I could no longer walk.

When the page is static (not static). Hum.
Is grammar a compass?
Are graphemes?
Read a line then off, tangential, elsewhere, making a note, losing my place.

Kate Briggs, photograph of her personal copy of Roland Barthes's *La Préparation du Roman, I et II, Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1978-1979 et 1979-1980)*, traces écrites, Seuil IMEC.

'Having been shelved so close to the window for so long – for some fourteen years now, since I am fairly sure I bought the book the year Seuil first published it – the spine, if not the cover of the book itself, had been bleached by the sun, turning its original deep dark red into something closer to mud, pink, the colour of unbaked clay.'

– Kate Briggs, translator of the English edition of Roland Barthes's *The Preparation of the Novel*.

1. All quotations and references that go unnamed throughout this text belong to, or have been appropriated, borrowed and paraphrased from: Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: Course and Seminars at the Collège de France 1978-1979 and 1979-1980*, trans. by Kate Briggs, ed. by Nathalie Léger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) (*La Préparation du roman, I et II, Cours et séminaires au Collège de France, 1978-1979 et 1979-1980*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995).

Preamble
(Ace of Cups)
A very bold colon:
an overflowing vessel.

Outline
(Six of Swords)
A meta-text for the purposes
of classification that will facilitate
dissemination and the transfer
of that which is classified.

Epigraph
(Queen of Coins)
Bringing the familiar to the far-
away. Creating the conditions
for memory. Scent.

Preamble
A preliminary or preparatory statement by which
someone might make an introduction → leading to an

Outline
Barthes lays out an overview of the beginning of writing
a novel. To do this he must first understand the desire to
write. 'I write to satisfy a desire.' And that this desire
stems from reading: 'I write because I have read'. I lose
count of the things I have read, but suppose that some
of them must have inspired me to write.

A line or set of lines
enclosing or indicating the shape of something –
a general description showing the essential features,
not the detail.
A kind of abstract – a summary that, in all honesty,
leaves me temporarily *panic-stricken* – unable to classify –
to find a phrase, a quote, or poem that might be set at
the beginning offering an

Epigraph
A summary of what it is I am trying to evoke –
the scent, the odour of something. The panic
continues into the

Plan
Of the Work to be written. A detailed proposal for doing
or achieving something – an intention or decision about
what I am going to do.
a) A point of departure →
transpositions – the obstacles that will have to be
overcome, the knots to be untied.
c) And then, a final suspense rather than conclusion.
But how to begin to write a plan when I don't know
how it will turn out, but I do care.

Parabase
The method of exposition – a comprehensive description
and explanation of an idea or theory and the action of
making something public that, at this moment in time,
renders me paralysed.

abstract

outline underlined

show your edges

reveal the thresholds
trace
a line
Polytechnique Presentation – How will I speak – from
where? Following Barthes;
'Unable to classify is *panic-stricken*.' (Where are we?) ...
and I cannot even type up my notes without straying,
recoiling to a state in which demarcation is subjective,
fragile, breaking down when category distance is too
narrow, where category loses the solidity of nameable
entity, where the 'interstitial blanks separating all these
entities from one another' (and who the fuck thought
I'd ever be quoting Foucault – not me) are the terrifying
here-be-monsters of the unmapped where identity
crumbles.³

being
unable to classify
is the worst
kind of social unease

Preamble
He makes a preliminary or preparatory statement;
he introduces.
Outline
He shows the main shape or edge of something,
without any details.
Epigraph
He selects a short quotation or saying at the beginning
of a book or chapter, intended to suggest its theme.

panic-stricken
does this look right to you?
what are we doing?
Plan
He produces a diagram or list of steps with details
of timing and resources, used to achieve an objective.
Parabase
He makes a direct address to the audience, sung
or chanted by the chorus on behalf of the author.
He digresses, addressing the reader.

Bibliography
He lists the books referred to in a scholarly work,
one that is typically printed as an appendix.

Begin over

² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*
(London and New York: Routledge 1980), 16, 188 [*L'Ordre des choses* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966)].
³ This paragraph is drawn in part from Emma Bullard, 'Category Error' / 'Category Terror',
in *The Blue Notebook*, 111 (2018), pp. 45–53.

Bibliography of those most frequently quoted authors presented in the form of a list of the books – a *bibliographie*, one might say. A catalogue or record which, like history, constantly changes when viewed in the light of the present. Some remain constant in their presence, while others take a temporary leave of absence only to return again, and again, to the collection of objects that lay – in more or less orderly or chaotic fashion – one on top of the other. Or is it alongside?

A Collective Bibliography of the Most Frequently Quoted Authors, Compiled by the Contributors.

BENJAMIN

→ (1934) *Berlin Childhood Around 1900: Hope in the Past*, trans. by Howard Eiland, Harvard University Press, 2006.

DELLUC

→ (1923) 'Le Silence', in *Écrits cinématographiques III: Dramas de Cinéma, scénarios et projets de films*, Cinéma de Français Cahiers du Cinéma, 1990.

DERRIDA

→ (1993) *Spectres of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, Routledge, 1994.

DIDI-HUBERMAN

→ (2011) *Baroque*, trans. by Samuel E. Martin, The MIT Press, 2017.

MOBERLEY & JOURDAIN

→ *Ghosts of the Transom*, self-published, 2016.

SHAH

→ *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin*, Octagon Press, 1989.

TOWNSEND

→ *Creative States of Mind: Psychoanalysis and the Artist's Process*, Routledge, 2019.

WITTIG

→ *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Beacon Press, 1992.

WOOD

→ *Without Mastery: Reading and Other Forces*, Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

for although I have not put it to the test as such I know

I have a plan.

This should be your plan

from desire → to fact

desire to write
a series of conceptions
jubilation
hope
inspiration
the position of the lower changes
an embodied desire

it is at least a plan

To follow this plan you must

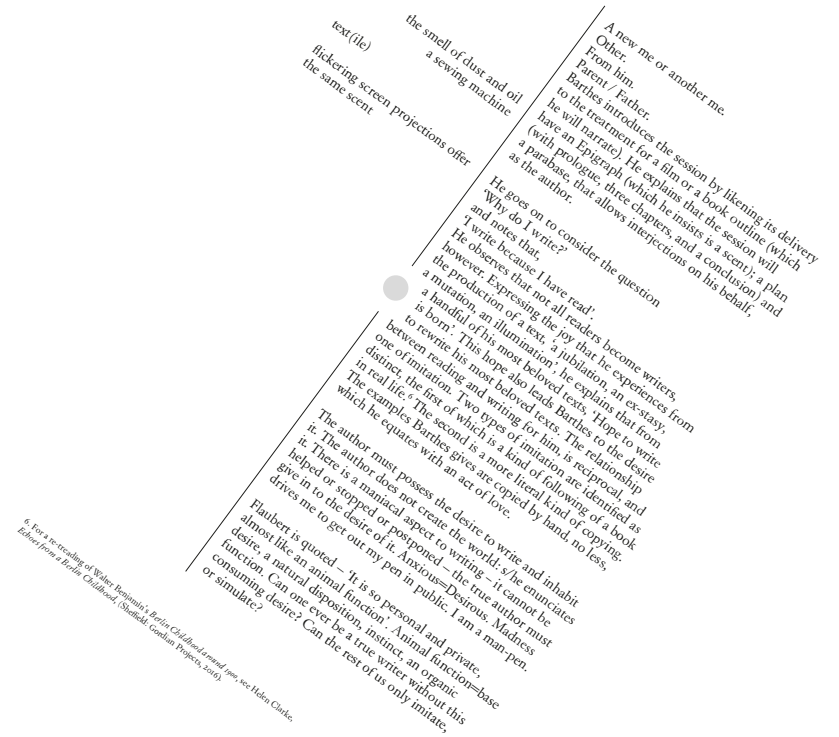
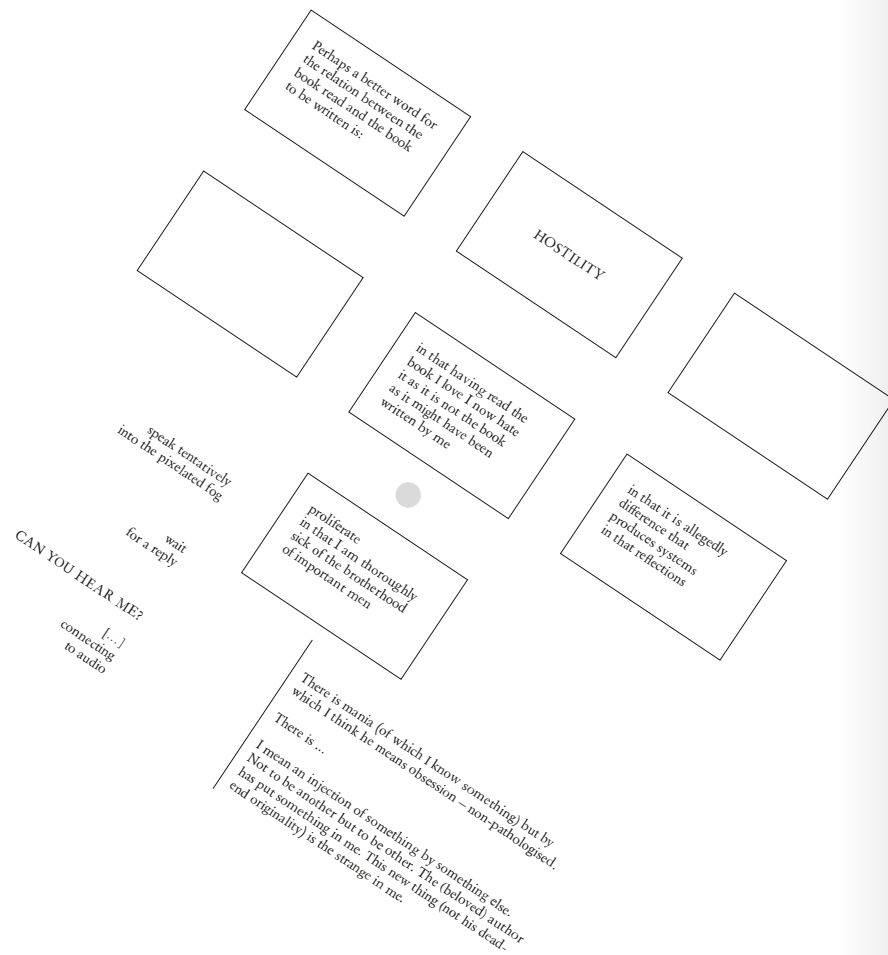
move from wanting to write

to actually writing.

Most used bibliography authors

Perhaps I am behind – ten years. I can reel off authors (alive and dead) I would have referred to. But it is not me that's out of date, it is Criticism. Recently is not equal to retro. I am discussing books here not media and can tell you Theory of Literature (German and U.S. province) is not the same as History of Literature (France). I am discussing literary theory – my own theory that comes from desire.

with eight books



6. For a recording of Walter Benjamin's *Paris Childhood around 1900*, see Helen Clarke, *Johns from the Berlin Childhood*, Shanghai, Gordon Project, 2015.

